



Not too long ago, Connie and I were walking together on a very busy street and a man approached us. He wasn't looking directly at either of us and was talking loudly while his arms flailed at his sides. As he got closer to us, we could tell from his comments that he was conversing with someone over his mobile phone (while using a hands-free connection). We passed each other while he continued to gesture broadly, and we could still hear him conversing when we were then about a ½ block away from him.

Connie turned to me and said: “Don’t Get Me Started!” It’s become our shared mantra –the phrase that we recite to each other every time we experience behavior that goes beyond any expectation or norm that we consider how a reasonable and socially intelligent person would act in a similar situation. It wasn’t very long ago that, upon seeing and hearing that man approaching us, we would quickly walk to the other side of the street, assuming that he was mentally ill or on drugs. But that was before wireless cell phone technology entered our lives. Now we immediately assume that persons talking out loud to no visible persons are talking on their mobile devices.

It’s really a paradigm-shift and points to something far deeper and more important happening in our globally-connected society. The convergence of rapidly changing technologies, evolving social mores and shifting cultural demographics triggered by immigration patterns is creating unprecedented challenges to the conventional norms that have traditionally regulated our expectations about acceptable social behavior. At times it seems that these challenges have so eclipsed contemporary society that the core trait that used to run through social behavior, the practice of common sense, has evaporated into the ether. Road rage and reckless Twitter-based shaming rants are just a few of the indicators that a cultural cluelessness has taken over in the vacuum left by the absence of common sense.

In times of great social upheaval during the last four centuries, etiquette books have provided the guidance that folks sought to get their cultural bearings and be assured safe passage among and between cultures. The present cultural cluelessness epidemic points to the fact that these books no longer adequately address societal needs for cultural advice. Today cultural transformations, fueled by technological advances, evolving social mores, shifting immigration patterns and generational and racial differences, are vastly changing our expectations about what we consider ‘proper’ behavior, making it less likely that folks can successfully rely on traditional etiquette books, that offer broad brush-stroked advice, to ground themselves socially.

We believe that these transformations, while offering great opportunities for social change, also require more of the citizens of this world. They require people to adopt new habits of thinking, listening and responding that will help them better navigate a world where the conventional rules governing the boundaries of private and public behavior are often ambiguous.

In our first book **“The Don’t Get Me Started! Toolkit – Strategies for a Culturally-challenged World”** and the workbooks, workshops and game shows that have evolved from this book, we provide the toolkit that you can use to skillfully assess and respond to the myriad situations you may encounter in this rapidly changing world. So whether you are playing games online, using a ‘gender-free’ restroom, sharing a picture on Facebook, conversing with friends in a café, applying in person for a new job or hosting an intergenerational event – you will be able to determine how the rules have changed and act in a manner that assures more successful outcomes.